

BELL OF THE CROSS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL



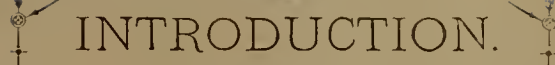
DEDICATED TO THE PATRONS OF THE S. F. WASH.

1879

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INTRODUCTION.



HE wondrous Bell!
The minstrel treasury immortal makes,
With countless worth of monumental gems;
Promulgates, rings its startling influence
On joy or sorrow, birth, or life, or death;
On duty, treason, industry, or worth;
And fondly dwells upon the stirring up
Of patriot blood; invoking terror, risk,
Or danger imminent; a child new-born,
A grave new-dug, or tyranny subdued;
Defeat retrieved, or glorious freedom gained,
Or victory won. But peals from Calvary
All these transcend!

Of hope, the Calvary Bell sublimely chimes,
Redemption and salvation evermore,
And brings sweet satisfaction to despair;
By salve of reason, raging passion soothes;
To "enter by the straight gate" ever tells
Humanity; devotion gently peals,
And justice, meekness, lowly charity.
Nor until universe and time shall end,
Shall cease the peal of Calvary Bell!

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CANTO I.

WHEN universe was still
An inexpressive and inactive void,
And tacit formlessness did still display
An inexplicable promiscuousness,
With purpose and proportion lost,
Ambiguous the darkness fell, anomalous,
Apparent but indistinct; yet still upon
The face of this nonentity expressive,
When spirits moved without design,
Yet absolute upon the void inert,
A nought with nothing at the uttermost,—
And blank and chaos are the meager terms
That scantily imply what that nothing meant,—
There manifested then a Sound Divine
From out infinitude of embryo;
And forth great wonder and amazement sprung
Throughout negation; for, peal on peal,
Announced the spoken WORD!
And then a consciousness surprising thrilled,
And rapture was confirmed. Transcendent LIGHT,
With prompt alacrity, obeyed the word,
And lo! "God saw that it was good"!
Now rang the requiem to idle waste;
Active stimulant replaced passive sloth;
The booming peal of the Creator's Bell,
Established Him and it omnipotent—
Both going forth, fiats irrefragable!

"Let there be Light!" the word implied, no more,
Yet straight there filed, in glorious wake,
Devotion. Love, and Peace, and Truth and Life,
In orderly confederacy.
The WORD, Creation's resolute first-born,
The great bell of all coming good!



CANTO II.

NOW, all was curiosity,
 Surprise, and admiration, and delight,
 And adoration, happiness, and praise.
 All pleasant, and naught repugnant did appear,
 And Self unthought of was, and yet unborn.
 The joyful bells of Heaven rang merrily
 To gleeful chimes only, until, woe betide!



Jealousy and sin came stealing in,
 And shocking, horrid fratricide appeared,
 Which changed the joyful peal to funeral knell.

"I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy
 conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth
 children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband,
 and he shall rule over thee."

And weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, set in,
 As solemn tolled the angered knell:

"Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow
 shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

Such was the warning knell
 Of multiplex anathema — the tocsin
 Of the alarum Bell of Heaven!



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CANTO III.

THE SOUL Divine,
Exalted triumph of creative skill,
Completest thing of all that God achieved,
For that very reason, first succumbed
To the debasing shock, and crumbled most
Emphatically to harsh dismemberment.

And so divine the godly attributes,
They slight resistance made, and transformation
Yielded up the newly-ordained TEAR;
And attribute, abashed, suffused a glow
Of conscious shame, a meretricious BLUSH;
Which added fuel to the flame that burned
With ignominy.
The rest, despondent, contrite, and forlorn,
The harrowing torture felt of sorrow and remorse;
Re-echoed loud new anguish and despair,
As indignant pealed the Bell of Heaven.

CANTO IV.

NOW, darksome gloom
Enshrouded all the land with heavy pall;
Obnoxious was the glare of day, and
shunned;
And lowering, hung gloomy and envious clouds,
As for final dissolution. Nipping frosts,
And blinding bitter winds now marshaled in
Disorder wild; sirocco and cyclone,
And shiver, tempest, and chill.
Debilitating pores their floods unlocked,
And oozed the grief that eyes, alone to empty,
Proved inadequate.

And direful scourge
Alliance made with dread calamity,

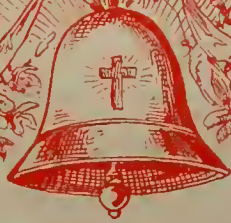
And gouged out rounded life, and withered it
Down to premature cadaverousness.
Then summoned to their aid debilitating hosts,
Of fatigues, agues, ailments, aches, and pains.
Annoyances now jostled into life.
Compulsory occupation overstrained,
Till all dejected were, and overwhelmed
With grief and desperation.

CANTO V.

AND SHADOW now,
Companion walked obnoxiously to substance,
And form and action mimicked skillfully
With gravity most ludicrous.
Daubing, shifting stains, upon the light's
Unsullied disc, reflected mocking imagery.
Offensive, noisome, reeking odors sprung,
From out the damp and darkness.
Everything in nature now
Presumed on a mockery to vilify;
And Sound invisible, became dismayed
To hear how babbling ECHO would mock,
The viewless shadow of a viewless thing!
Nor was the inexpressive THOUGHT exempt;
Remorse, and Conscience, and Regret, beside
A host of kindred, constituted shadow here.
Deserved the retribution was, and just,
For Man's abuse of confidence divine.

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good
and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day
that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

ECHO, the only shadow audibly gifted,
Caught up the sad refrain, and tapered it
To world's end, DIE! DIE! DIE!
Whilst all the others at the warning sign,
Exulting rushed to fill the breach, and DIE
Was still their battle-cry, till taken was
The citadel. — DIE! DIE!



CANTO VI.

IN awful majesty,
 Now DEATH stalked grimly forth. Whereon
 He turned his glance, all withered was and sere ;
 Prerogative proclaimed, as far as extends
 Respondent sound, or darkness, light or shade ;
 He uttered that which terrified with awe,
 And announced his rigid rule, death and decay,
 But though decay, still non-decay ; for life
 Is born from out decay, from dust to dust.
 And universal was the law, on land,
 On sea, in space, or atmosphere ; and all
 To equal forfeit he condemned. Or man,
 Or moth, or mastodon, to him were dust ;
 And broadcast strewn were blast, and blight, and rot,
 With every element impressed to aid.
 The drop of water, and the spark of flame,
 The breath of air, the grain of sand, were all
 Enrolled destroyers at his will.
 Such dire results, the question now gave rise,
 If universe were at an end, or no.

CANTO VII.

THREE hallowed Bethlehem !
 And lo ! from out her radiant depths there
 came
 A tender whisper of compassion, relief
 For a benighted world's distress.
 And quick expanded, swelled the sound
 To mammoth peal, electric and full-toned,

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And rounded into competence.
Its burden ravished every listening ear,
Expanding into volumes full, until
Extremest limit bounded its extent.
"Glory to God!" it pealed — "Glory to God!"

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth
peace, good will towards men."

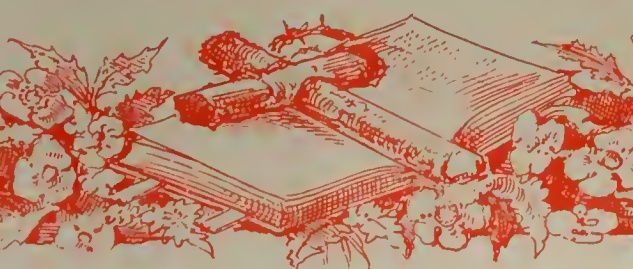
For an angel of the Lord,
Upon them came, and round about them shone
The glory of the Lord; for halo round his brow
Was radiant, with such effulgent light,
That they were terrified and sore afraid.

"Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings
of great joy, which shall be to all people. For
unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a
Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

The heavenly host then tuned to psaltery,
And snatched the burden was by passing breeze,
And wafted to eternal spheres.
"Glory to God!" they sung — "Glory to God!"

"Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth
peace, good will towards men."

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THE BELL OF THE CROSS

Now came the bitter cup—the Passions.
The heir to earth and heaven suffered more
Than any world may suffer and yet stand;
For agony and scourge now brought on
That last heart-rending prayer—



“ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI!”
“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!”

The curtain of the temple rent in twain,
And earth did quake, and tongues of living fire
Proclaimed the end of this great tragedy;
And muffled were the Bells of Heaven,
That pealed the dolorous requiem!

CANTO VIII.


 TWO suns both rose and set,
 O'ershadowed by the grief with which all earth
 Was dimmed, when lo, behold! the third arose
 With brilliancy excessive; and all the world
 Was bathed in wonderful refulgent glory!
 A sea of gladness all mankind suffused!
 Throughout, there throbbed exhilarating thrill
 In comprehensive sympathy.
 For *Christ had risen!* and all who sorely grieved,
 At his heart-rending sufferings, now
 Mourning changed to giddy rhapsody.
 He, hand in hand, with angels walked the earth;
 And proved emphatically, that all his griefs
 Were temporal, and transiently imposed,
 Convincingly to waft him to immortal life!

* * * * *

Once more, the Bells of Heaven pealed merrily,
 Their glorious burden was of Christ and Cross!
 From pole to pole, exulting, joyful chimes
 Expanded into luoyancy, and swelled,
 And filled all space.
 Great eddies circled in the atmosphere
 Until the last triumphant wave
 Dashed over either pole; annihilated
 Became distance between antipodes,
 And all in common brotherhood were linked.
 And reverence sprang up in solitudes,
 And sanctified became desert wastes, and all
 In universe became redeemed!

All hail to the Bell of the Cross!
 From Calvary to bounds unlimited,
 It thrills effulgent peals. (The only sound
 In universe that radiates beams of light!)
 And with potent volume constant peals
 Divine assurance of heavenly gift to all.

All hallowed be the Bell
 Which peals of the Cross! All enduring
 Be its chimes! All hail!

FINIS.

